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ST. LOUIS - Four veterans treated at the St. Louis VA Medical Center's dental clinic have tested positive for hepatitis, but the sources of the illness are unknown. Further testing will try to determine if inadequately sterilized dental equipment is to blame. The results come about a month after the VA sent letters to 1,812 veterans treated at the clinic from Feb. 1, 2009, through March 11, 2010, urging them to take blood tests because improperly cleaned dental equipment could have exposed them to hepatitis B, hepatitis C or HIV.

The VA has said the risk of infection is remote.

Of 1,022 veterans tested and notified of results, two tested positive for hepatitis B and two for hepatitis C, the VA said. None have tested positive for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

The VA said extensive epidemiological testing is under way to try and determine how long each of the veterans has been infected and the source of the infections. It wasn't clear how long that process would take.

Congressman Russ Carnahan released a statement Friday saying " I'm deeply saddened to hear that there are veterans who have tested positive, and it is very good to hear that the VA will be taking care of these individuals. We should expect nothing less."

Congressman Carnahan added, "I have grave concerns about how the VA is notifying veterans. If there were any individuals who tested positive, even if those results were preliminary, the VA should not have kept them in the dark. They should have been notified immediately so they could seek treatment and take precautions to protect their spouses and loved ones."

Veterans and family members who may have further questions or concerns are urged to contact Congressman Russ Carnahan's office at 314-962-1523.

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